

## ***FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** December 8, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Mount Silcox Wildlife Management Area Forest Management Project (R1)

**Division:** Wildlife                      **Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Min

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to enhance forest habitat on approximately 118 acres of the Mount Silcox WMA near Thompson Falls. The treatments would improve aspen habitats, enhance or create openings in the forest canopy to increase bunchgrass and woody browse production, and promote development of multi-story forest structure. Treatments would improve winter and spring habitat for elk, bighorn sheep and mule deer, as well as species dependent or associated with aspen forests. Treatments would also promote the development of forest structure favored by sensitive species including Cassin's Finch, Clark's Nutcracker, Evening Grosbeak, Lewis's Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, and Varied Thrush. The treatments would include commercial timber harvest, hand-thinning, and prescribed fire.

The cost of the forest habitat treatments are expected to be covered by the sale of merchantable timber byproduct. Any revenue in excess of project costs would be deposited into the legislatively-established FWP Forest Management Account to implement further forest management projects pursuant to the provisions of 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv). Contingent on analysis and approvals, this work could begin as early as winter 2017.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Upon approval of this proposal, FWP would complete further analysis and obtain public input in the form of a draft environmental assessment and associated public review.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

No action would result in perpetuating the current condition and, barring the occurrence of a natural disturbance event, forests would continue to grow and expand in predictable successional pathways, including conifers shading out aspen, bunchgrasses, and important woody browse. Stand structure and species composition is expected to become more homogenous and simplified (increase in single-story, closed canopy forests with less diverse understory) resulting in a long-term decline in biodiversity and habitat availability for a number of sensitive species.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission approve this project, which would allow FWP to develop an environmental analysis. Implementing the proposed treatment would enhance aspen, forage production for big game, and favor development of productive wildlife habitat for a variety of endemic species.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve FWP to proceed with an environmental analysis and public review of the Mount. Silcox Wildlife Management Area forest management project.